POST-MORTEM

8/31/71

Dear Harold,

Since returning from your place, this business about "puncture" wound has been bugging me. I want to set forth my position on it now, a position which still is at odds with yours, and if this does not change your thinking, then it is at least a record of my own position.

I am glad that at least you have refrained from saying, without any qualification, that "puncture means entrance." I have noted the instances in the other 2 PM's where you say this, so you can change it.

However, I still cannot accept your new formulation that puncture, in the one instance in the holograph, means entrance. Understand, I am in complete agreement that Perry told Humes there was a puncture wound of the anterior neck; Perry admits having used that adjective, and this is what Humes wrote. I also believe that Perry either told Humes this puncture wound was or appeared to be one of entrance, or Humes did not let Perry tell him this (for he must have known anyway) and merely gave Perry the word that officially this was now an exit. So, Perry told Humes about a "puncture" wound which he thought was an entrance wound.

Your position seems to be that because he thought it was an entrance wound, when Perry described it as a "puncture" wound, he meant entrance. It is with this that I disagree. My position is that puncture and entrance are exclusive of each other, that Perry could have called it a puncture wound even if he thought it was an exit. In itself, it is not determinative.

Your citation of the dictionary definition is irrelevant to me and, I assure you, is probably even less relevent to medical men. There are four medical terms to describe skin wounds, and they are commonly used by doctors to describe wounds in accord with the medical meanings. The four types are: puncture, contusion, abrasion, and laceration. For a doctor to call a wound puncture tells us nothing more than that there has been a complete penetration of the epidermis and dermis of the skin at one point on the body. It does not tell whether the puncture was made upon entrance or exit. To say that there was a puncture wound of the anterior neck is to say nothing more than that some object penetrated the skin at that point, without disclosing from which direction it came.

Now, it happens that Perry felt this puncture wound was one of entrance. As McClelland pointed out, it was characteristic of the usual entrance wound the doctors were accustomed to seeing. My own instinct is that they saw it had an abrasion ring, which would be a major clue, and also judged that because it was so tiny, it must have been entrance. But all this is independent of the fact that, whatever its characteristics, this was a puncture wound.

The fact that Humes quoted Perry as having seen a "puncture" wound neither proves nor disproves that the puncture was also an entrance. What Humes omits is Perry's original statement that this appeared to be entrance. What is significant about this description in the autopsy report is that it has been stricken in every other instance it was used, and that in each instance, it was used in describing entrance wounds. Somebody didn't want that word used, but was careless in not crossing it out the first time, in reference to the anterior wound. It was then omitted, in a way we do not exactly know, from the typed version. This is incredibly suspicious, and it seems to me that someone above did not want to risk even a subjective interpretation of "puncture." The farthest I am willing to go is that in light of Humes' use of the word puncture, its application to the anterior neck wound implies entrance. I refuse to go so far as to say that it means or was intended to mean entrance.

I believe you fail to establish or document how Perry's calling this a puncture wound is the same as his calling it an entrance wound, simply on the basis that he felt it was caused by an enterring missile.

A sample analogy: Suppose, instead of saying this was a puncture wound, Perry said it was a round hole in the skin. I substitute this because it is devoid of meaning in the same way that puncture is: A round wound, just like a puncture wound, can be either an entrance or an exit, the one description not being enough to tell. Now, Perry still feels that this round wound looked like an entrance wound. Humes quotes Perry as saying only that he noted a round hole. You would not be justified in saying that because Perry thought the hole was one of entrance, his description quoted by Humes, "round hole" also means entrance. Humes' quotation of this one aspect of the description leaves out the information about entrance.

The anterior neck wound was a puncture wound and an entrance wound. That does not change the meaning of puncture, even in this case.

So, I will not be satisfied until you can give documentation that, in this one case, when Dr. Perry said puncture wound, he meant entrance wound. You see, to say as I believe is the case, that when Perry said this was a puncture wound, it was without reference to whether or not it was also an entrance wound, is not to say that he meant exit or even "not entrance." I believe he meant nothing more than what is included in the medical definition, that something punctured the skin at this point. Perry himself could easily refute you here by saying that while he did originally think this was an entrance wound, that was not included in his description of it as a puncture wound, that the two were seperate descriptions. Of course, Perry is not about to come out with anything. But I do believe this is his position, honestly so with respect to puncture.

You cannot expect your readers to take your word that here Perry intended puncture to mean entrance. That leaves room for serious and perfectly legitimate doubts, as I have. You emphasized to me over and over again that you assume your readers are not morons and you refuse to insult them by spelling out things as if you were writing for complete idiots. Fine. But as one of your readers, I am offended that you can say Perry meant puncture to denote entrance and offer no substantitation. By substantiation I do not mean proof that Perry felt this was an entrance wound, for that is beyond question. I mean proof that when he said Puncture and not entrance he in fact meant entrance. If I recall properly, you do not even say that this is your interpretation, which it is. So, if you are unwilling to change your interpretation, then by all means you must make it clear that this is an interpretation, that there can be no direct citation to such information but rather it is the particular way you put together and analyzed several pieces of information.

Further, I believe this is more than quibbling. I believe it seriously detracts from an otherwise persuasive and legitmate arguement which you have. What I think should be emphasized is that this represents an unauthorized change between documents we are told are identical, and that this alteration eliminated the inference that the President was shot from the front. When you say, as you do, that it eliminated the statement that the President was shot from the front, you seriously weaken the whole case because the staement was simply that there was a puncture wound. It was not a statement that there was an entrance wound, although that is the implication.

I presume that you are steaming by now, since when I tried to present this argument to you in person, you grew impatient and (it seemed) angry. Still, you have failed to persuade me you are right and I am wrong. If you do not wish to take the time to do that, then at least qualify your writing on this point, making it explicit that you have imparted your own meaning on a series of facts. Without such a qualification, I really believe you are deceiving your readers.

Best,

Humes